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KENYA:

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THE LIONS AND THE MAASAI

by Gary K. Clarke

(From *The Just Now News*, the Cowabunga newsletter)

The setting is the Maasai Mara in Kenya and our group was on a game drive when we found a pride of lions feeding on a just killed wildebeest. The soft early morning light was perfect and the exposed rib cage was brilliant red against the green grass. I sensed that we might see more than just lions feeding on a carcass and the group was more than willing to exercise patience, even to the point of possibly missing breakfast. Over the next couple of hours we witnessed the full cycle of one of nature's great dramas.

Two hyenas were patrolling in the distance but then disappeared. Several species of vultures were flying in from different directions and formed a semi-circle at a safe distance. A couple of black backed jackals nervously joined them. The lions were about halfway through the carcass when something caught their attention and seemed to startle them. They paused for a second and then ran away with great speed. I was mystified until I scanned with my binoculars and saw two Maasai warriors approaching from the opposite direction.

Over the years on Safari I had always heard (and even read) that lions seemed to have an innate fear of Maasai warriors. Lions reportedly would run from them on sight, seemingly able to recognize that they were Maasai by their stance or posture or their long stride. I wasn't sure if I believed this or not, but this incident was rather convincing.

As soon as the lions left the carcass, the vultures rushed in with the jackals nipping here and there. Shortly thereafter one of the hyenas reappeared and chased off the vultures. I had forgotten about the Maasai who apparently went on their way as one of the lionesses came charging back to the carcass chasing away the hyena. She stood guard over the carcass and fed briefly, then slowly walked away. The second hyena appeared and, although apparently submissive to the first hyena, was allowed to feed on the kill. By this

time the carcass was nearly gone, the vultures were leaving and I was out of film. As we headed back to camp one of the group said, "That was better than Discovery Channel".

Another drama occurred the next morning during our hot air balloon flight. The balloon holds 12 and we had 12 in the group who had signed on. I rode in a chase vehicle as I wanted to get some photos of the balloon flight (and join the group for the champagne breakfast).

Toward the end of the flight the balloon was descending and, although the light was not good, I turned my camera vertically and framed the balloon at the top with the Mara at the bottom for perspective. *HAI!* In the lower left hand corner of my lens was the silhouette of a standing male lion. What a shot. I zoomed out to get a little better perspective and in the right hand corner of the frame was *another* male lion! I exclaimed to my Kenyan driver, an old friend, who calmly replied, "Shetani, . . . simba mingi". ("Gary . . . many lion".) I glanced around the vehicle and saw that we were surrounded by an active pride on the move — just here, just now. All ages, all sizes, both sexes. My group in the balloon were as excited as I.

The balloon landed upright in the midst of this pride of 14 lions. The pilot instructed everyone to stay in the basket while he kept the envelope inflated and continued blasting the burner trying to scare the lions away. They were undeterred and stood transfixed, looking up at the balloon. Those of us in chase vehicles were gunning our motors, banging on the doors, and driving towards the lions but they paid no heed. Shortly thereafter the pride, as if on a signal moved away as a unit, and once again we saw Maasai warriors on the horizon. Here was a second example on the same Safari of the supposed fear that lions have of the Maasai. It made a believer out of me.

And some people ask me why I keep going back to Africa.



Safaris since 1974.

THE GRANDEST THEATRE

by Brian Hesse

(From *The Just Now News*, the Cowabunga newsletter, First Edition, 1999)

Les Miserables. Miss Saigon. Rent. When I lived near London's West End theatre district I managed to see many world-class shows. Yet none can equal the scenes played out by nature as seen on Safari. Consider the following:

6:00 a.m. Departing camp -

A full moon was setting in the west, growing in size and increasing in clarity as it approached the horizon. In the east the sun was rising, highlighting the hills in a white aura and painting the sky fluorescent pink, yellow, and orange. Into this scene appeared an inverted, teardropped silhouette: a giant hot air balloon. We approached,

clambered in, and soon rose into the sky. Burners provided momentary relief from the morning's chill, then when turned off, accentuated the suspense-filled silence of the African dawn. All around were unbroken vistas, and in the sea of grass below, countless animals and game-trails were visible. At one point efforts to locate Lake Victoria in the distance were interrupted as we drifted over an elephant herd...

10:00 a.m. In the vehicle --

The cheetah was moving, we were not. Yet the gap between us continued to close. Minutes passed. Five hundred feet became 100 feet, 100 became 25, until the animal was right beside our vehicle. With supreme confidence she cast one look over her shoulder, then strolled along the length of our Rover, her tail brushing nonchalantly against the doors...

4:00 p.m. On the savannah -

The kill was recent. From a distance wildebeest and Thomson's gazelle bobbed their heads nervously before moving on. A few topi stood absolutely still, fixing their gaze on the lion. The two males, stomachs bulging, continued to chew intently on topi bones held between their paws. Already the "bush telegraph" was working: a pair of black-backed jackal appeared, hoping to scavenge a free meal. Vulture might soon begin circling overhead, in turn possibly attracting hyena. Unexpectedly a lioness appeared; her stomach, too, was full. Behind tumbled her two cubs. She was leading them back to the kill...

If I had a ticket to just one of the scenes described above, my excitement would be hard to contain. Imagine, then, how I felt after I had the privilege of witnessing all of them in Kenya's Maasai Mara -- on the same day! One of the greatest aspects of being on Safari is that no one can predict fully a day's plot or plot-twists, or what cameo appearances might be made. Furthermore, a person would be hard-pressed to find a stage with such spectacular scenery on which to watch it unfold. The interaction between people, animals, and landscapes provides unscripted, unparalleled, once-in-a-lifetime memories. Everything is a first and final run. Fortunate are those of us who get to the grandest theatre of them all: AFRICA.



Safaris since 1974.

LESS WILDLIFE? MORE WILDLIFE?

by Gary K. Clarke

(From *The Just Now News*, the Cowabunga newsletter, First Edition, 1999)

We hear a lot of "doom and gloom" about wildlife these days: television specials on endangered species, fund raising appeals from conservation organizations, statistic after

statistic on dwindling animal populations. This is not to say that some species aren't threatened in the wild, or that we shouldn't be concerned. But there is so much negative sentiment expressed that it is often misleading.

I often challenge people on Safari to count the individual mammals we see from the first day to the last, and I predict it will frequently be upwards of 10,000 on a two-week Safari, especially in East Africa. (This does not include those Safaris that experience the migration, where the count could be in the hundreds of thousands.) Granted, it is a daunting task to count individual specimens and to insure you have not tabulated the same ones twice or more. However, with patience, keen observation, practice, cooperation from the group and professional input from your driver/guides, it can be done. (On the other hand, I wouldn't begin to count birds — there simply are too many.)

While total numbers of mammals is a good indicator, variety of species is another. It reflects the status of the ecosystem, the stability of the habitat, and the adaptability of animals despite the many changes taking place in the natural areas of Africa. And while I don't like to make a "numbers game" out of wildlife sightings, it is a reflection of the diversity of wildlife.

My first Kenyan Safari was in 1974. I only recently completed yet another Kenyan Safari. Curious to see what changes had taken place in the intervening decades, I reviewed journals from that first Safari to Kenya and my most recent one. Kenya in the 21st Century compared very favorably with Kenya 1974. In fact, my recent Kenya trip was a truly amazing Safari.

Highlights included sightings of seven free ranging black rhino, six side-striped jackal, three cheetah, two leopard and 46 lion! In addition, we saw Jackson's hartebeest, suni antelope, and gerenuk in feeding posture. So much nocturnal animal activity occurred that it was difficult to go to bed: rhino and elephant at the waterhole, spotted hyena and genet scavenging, a mother hippo and her two young in the same narrow river and a short distance from a monstrous crocodile!

Then there were the unrepeatable scenes and interactions: a troop of over 100 baboon running at top speed single file across the shallow crocodile-infested Uaso Nyiro River; the reaction of a spotted hyena clan when an outside hyena interloper came in; and the dramatic stand of two adult bull Cape buffalo (Old Dagga Boys) against a pride of nine lion (two male, seven female) — both buffalo charged up out of a *donga* (draw) and chased the lion repeatedly, causing them to run for their lives and to scatter through the bush!

Two weeks on Safari in Kenya quickly dispel the doom and gloom misconceptions often projected about African wildlife. The number of animals, the variety of species and the marvelous behaviors to behold all make for the experience of a lifetime.



Safaris since 1974.

TIPS FOR SAFARI PACKING

by Nancy Cherry

(From *The Just Now News*, the Cowabunga newsletter)

You're thinking of fulfilling your lifetime dream: a Safari to Africa. You may have even sent in your deposit to hold your space. Now a jillion questions pop in to your mind and one of them is bound to be what to pack. Perhaps a look at the beginning of this past century will help provide some perspective at the beginning of this new one.

Martin and Osa Johnson were a Kansas couple who, in the early 1900s, undertook numerous African Safaris. Osa kept very good records and when they landed in Mombasa, Kenya (they went by ship in those days) the crates were unloaded and she listed everything in them as the customs inspectors opened them.

The list is quite long, so we'll just cover some of the highlights. A partial list: cameras, dish rags, aprons, soap (Osa wrote: "mountains of it, a gift from Sidney Colgate"), folding chairs, tables, washtub, enamel dishes, tanks for rain water, Delco Electric system, Coleman stoves, flashlights, butter churns, fish hooks, chains (for towing), papers, pencil, ink, magazines, books, wearing apparel and seeds (she planted sunflowers in their camp at Marsabit).

Today you needn't concern yourself with bedding, dishes, food or tools. Nearly everything is done for you on Safari. Food is excellently prepared, making use of fresh fruits and vegetables grown in the area, with delectable main courses ranging from fish to lamb, to beef and chicken; deserts are overwhelming. You do not have to set up your own tent - even if you're staying in a tented camp. Most tented camps are known as "permanent" tented camps. That is, the tent is erected on a concrete slab with ample rugs on the floor of the tent; it is under a thatched roof to give you additional protection from the rain; and in most instances you have a private shower and a flush toilet attached to the back of your tent. However, we at Cowabunga still recommend packing some of the very same items Martin and Osa brought on their Safaris. Indeed, we suggest that a person should *always* have a torch (Safari-speak for flashlight), *always* have a pen, and *always* have an emergency supply of toilet paper (although I think Osa was too much of a lady to mention the latter). If you want to bring sunflower seeds, that's OK too.

Of course the Johnsons were staying for months at a time in Kenya, and setting up house (or more appropriately, camp) both in Nairobi and out in the bush. We go for two weeks and the basics are more than amply provided for. Hence, the Cowabunga maxim: Those Who Travel Light Shall Be Rewarded.



Safaris since 1974.

NIGHT OF THE GIRAFFE BALLET

by Gary K. Clarke

(From *The Just Now News*, the Cowabunga newsletter)

Sweetwaters, in my opinion, is a gentle introduction to the African bush and its wildlife, and a great way to start a Safari. On our first day we had driven from Nairobi in the morning, arriving at camp in time for lunch. Most of the group were "first timers", and thrilled to actually be in Africa. Our sightings had been primarily limited to zebra, impala, and warthog. Still, the group was enthusiastic and excited, and so was I.

On our return to camp from our afternoon game drive, the group drifted back to their tents for a shower, then later moseyed down for sundowners and dinner after dark. By dusk most had assembled in the Waterhole Bar, an open elevated thatched roof enclosure with a direct view of the waterhole. Low level floodlights illuminated the waterhole forming a giant soft-edged circle. A brilliant orange moon rose over the far horizon, hanging suspended like a stage decoration. The entire scene appeared unreal, similar to a fabricated special effect.

Then, unexpectedly, it happened.

First, from the darkness of the surrounding bush emerged four Defassa waterbuck. Robust thickset antelope, they are characterized by a shaggy brown or rufous coat. Males have heavily ringed horns that curve backwards, outwards and upwards. White markings on chin and muzzle, inside the ears, and around the eyes were quite distinctive in the floodlight.

Next -- the most unbelievable sight!

One by one, a string of reticulated giraffe came out of the night in single file, as if in a parade. When giraffes walk, front and back legs on the same side of the body move at the same time, resulting in a gentle swaying motion. Eventually there were twelve giraffe at the waterhole, appearing as though spotlighted on a darkened theatre stage.

Now, the dance began. Some giraffe awkwardly straddled their front legs, gracefully bending their long necks forward until their lips touched the ground. After a taste of salt, they bolted into the air, kicking and jumping in a most un-giraffe-like manner. Others arched their long necks backward and danced on their long legs. I'd never seen such unusual behavior.

The artistic movements of the giraffe were emphasized by the light against the darkness. There was such precision, movements were elaborate and formal, having a slow-motion-like quality. The atmosphere was charged with silence and the giraffe made no sound. It was an impromptu giraffe ballet produced on nature's stage. My group was transfixed!

The supporting cast arrived unannounced: eight zebra with their contrasting black and white stripes; thirteen eland, the largest of all antelope, with thick spiraled horns and tufted dewlaps hanging below their necks.

What a fantastic show of nature -- a momentary glimpse into the secret lives of these magnificent wild creatures! It was enough to send a shiver of joy down my spine. I only wish *all* Cowabunga groups could have seen the giraffe ballet.



Safaris since 1974.

STRANDED IN SAMBURU WITH THE WAJUKUU

by Gary K. Clarke

(From *The Just Now News*, the Cowabunga newsletter, Second Edition, 2001)

In November of 1974 I had my largest group ever on Safari: 24 people (never again!). In June 2001 I had one of my smallest groups: just three. But - they were my three oldest grandchildren (or Wajukuu in KiSwahili), ages 10, 11 and 11. Never again! (Just kidding.)

Actually, they kept me busy as a group of 24, or even 12, but in a different way. They were ready, they were excited and they knew too much from the start. However, that was my fault.

All of my ten grandchildren want to go on a Safari sometime and I usually do not take youngsters unless they are at least twelve years old. Yet, if it is your grandkids, you make an exception. Nonetheless, I felt it was important they be properly prepared for this once-in-a-lifetime experience. So, I devised a course of study I called *Safari 101* and a series of *Indabas* (a Zulu term from South Africa meaning "a matter for discussion"). Assignments included: African geography, African wildlife, cultures, KiSwahili, maps studies, geography flash cards, and wildlife videos. Additionally, I structured a series of "field trips" to area Museums and Zoos so they could hone their mammal and bird spotting skills, use of binoculars and cameras, and maintain a Journal and Wildlife Checklist.

The first order of business was to assign a KiSwahili name to each grandchild, based on their favorite (or appropriate) animal. Kyle (age 11) is Twiga Mtoto (giraffe child), Courtney (age 11) is Duma Mtoto (cheetah child), and Drew (10) is Nyati (Cape Buffalo child). Then I developed a curriculum with The weekly Indaba sessions began a year and a half before our scheduled departure date. Sometimes we had them at Main Camp, on my library/study at home, or outside under a tree. Our field trips took us to Zoos in Topeka, Manhattan, Salina and Wichita, Kansas, Kansas City, Missouri (& their IMAX theatre), the Martin & Osa Johnson Safari Museum in Chanute, Kansas, as well as numerous area bird watching sessions. And we took a round trip flight from Kansas City to Chicago so they could learn the nuances (and frustrations) of air travel.

I'll have to say that the grandkids were eager and enthusiastic (sometimes even correcting my KiSwahili). In fact, their parents often lamented that they wished the grandkids would work this hard on their regular school studies! While she was not old enough to actually go on Safari just now, we included Kyle's younger sister Becca (8) in the activities, and she did very well.

At long last the big day arrived and the journey began from Kansas to New York and then the 14_ hour flight directly to Johannesburg, South Africa. After an overnight in Joburg, we had a flight up the continent to Kenya.

There were many highlights from our adventures in Kenya, Zimbabwe (Victoria Falls), and South Africa. Still, one stands out in my mind, and that of the Wajukuu as well. We were in Samburu, along the Uaso Nyiro River, watching elephants in the bush and in the river. In our concentrations we did not realize that eventually we were surrounded by *twenty-four* elephants. There was no danger and the grandchildren were delighted. Even so, John our Driver Guide felt it best to move down the trail a bit. That's when we discovered we were stuck in the sand. Some of the elephants were so close that we dared not get out and push. So John used his two-way radio to call for help.

The only problem was that his frequency was not the same as the nearby Samburu Serena Lodge where we were staying. Hence, he had to radio the 214 miles to the Nairobi office of TransWorld Safaris, asked them to telephone Serena headquarters in Nairobi to have them radio back up to Serena Lodge in Samburu. They received the message and a rescue vehicle was dispatched. In the time it took for the rescuers to arrive on the scene, the elephants moved off and we were able to get out and push ourselves free.

When John radioed Nairobi, that transmission was monitored by every other TransWorld Safari vehicle throughout Kenya. And when the Nairobi Serena headquarters radioed their Samburu Lodge, that transmission was monitored by every other Serena Lodge throughout Kenya. And, of course, all the other Drivers and Lodge Staffs told everyone else. Unbeknown to us, word spread quickly through this East African nation that straddles the Equator, and everyone we went on the rest of the Safari the Kenyans were smiling and laughing and saying, "Oh, Cowabunga; we heard about you getting stranded in Samburu with your wajukuu while surrounded by 24 elephants!"

At first I was a bit embarrassed, but the grandchildren thought it was cool. They were famous in Kenya.

Personally, I liked being surrounded by elephants. And if I'm going to be stranded in Samburu, I like being with my wajukuu.



Safaris since 1974.